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A Tribute to Dr. Collis Geren

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A TRIBUTE TO Dr. COLLIS GEREN



Collis Geren, Ph.D. retired from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, in June of 2010 as the longtime Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost of Research and Sponsored Programs. He has been a longtime supporter and member of the Arkansas Academy of Science, with quality statewide science education as a top personal priority.

He was appointed Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate School in 1991. At that time, the Graduate School had fewer than 2,400 students. By the fall of 2008, the Graduate School enrollment had climbed to 3,370, and new awards for research had grown from \$41.2 million in 1997 to \$72.3 million in 2006.

Collis' first priority has always been the students. He started his career with a B.S.E. from Northeastern State College in Tahlequah, OK in 1967. That was followed by three years in a job he loved, as the high school science teacher in Picher, Oklahoma. Higher education beckoned and that led to an M.S. in chemistry from Kansas State College of Pittsburg and a Ph.D. in biochemistry at Oklahoma State University studying the biological activity of the venom of the brown recluse spider, *Loxosceles reclusa*. During this time, he learned to "love" spider hunting, and he would collect as many as 200 specimens a night in dark, old barns and buildings. After two years as a Research Associate at the University of Kansas Medical Center studying enzymes, in 1976 he accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. At the U of A, his research interests returned to the biological and chemical characterization of venom components of the brown recluse spider and expanded to include the venom of some snakes such as rattlesnakes and copperheads. A year later, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences made him the first Arkansas recipient of a Research Career Development Award with an \$110,000 research grant. The grant paid his salary and benefits for five years while he researched the toxic components of venoms. In 1986, the Arkansas Alumni Association recognized him with its Distinguished Alumni Award for teaching and research. In the course of collecting thousands of spiders followed by the removal of microscopic venom glands, protein purification and characterization techniques, monoclonal antibody technology, and biochemical pharmacology, he supervised 9 Ph.D. students, 2 M.S. students and 9 Honors Undergraduates. Also during his teaching career in Chemistry and Biochemistry, he authored or co-authored proposals that resulted in more than \$7.5 million in funding for research and more than 50 publications.

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Collis' titles have changed through the years. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1979 and Professor in 1984. He was president of the honorary science fraternity Sigma Xi from 1983-84. In 1986 Collis became Vice-chair of Chemistry and Biochemistry and served as Chair from 1987-91. He also served as the interim first Chair of the newly created Department of Biological Sciences Department from 1990--91. Collis was elected Chair of the Campus Faculty in 1991. In December 1991, he became Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice Chancellor for Research. In 2000 the last title changed to Vice Provost of Research and Sponsored Programs and Dean of the Graduate School.

Collis has served and continues to serve in a variety of statewide committees some of which are: Arkansas EPSCOR Committee (1987-2010) ; SILO Board; NASA Space Grant Committee; Game & Fish Commissioner (2/91-6/91); State SREB/non SREB Coordinator (11/90-6/93); EPSCoR Committee Co-Chair (1992-93); EPSCoR Committee Chair (1993-2000); EPSCOR Committee Vice Chair, 2000-2010; DOE EPSCoR Chair; EPA EPSCoR Subcommittee (1991-2010); NASA EPSCoR (1993-2010); DoD EPSCoR Chair for Arkansas (1993-2010) Governor's Task Force for Manufacturing Extension (1993-2010); Governor's R&D Task Force; Clinton Library Academic Program Committee; ORAU University, Government and Industry Relations Committee (1991-1995). He has also been involved in ASTA, STEM, and the Arkansas Discovery Museum Board.

As Dean of the Graduate School, Collis was responsible for the quality of the graduate academic programs as well as the quality and quantity of graduate students. The University of Arkansas Press, the Survey Research Center, the Arkansas Biotechnology Center, and the interdisciplinary Ph.D. Programs in Photonics and Electronic Materials, Public Policy, and Cell and Molecular Biology all reported to Collis.

As Vice Provost, some of his duties involved assisting university personnel in obtaining funding for their scholarship, then initiating the management once awards were made. He was also responsible for the management of the University's intellectual property and a deactivated nuclear reactor (SEFOR) owned by the UofA. Since retirement, Collis hasn't slowed down. He is a lifelong car enthusiast and retirement has allowed him more time to focus on his love of restoring vintage automobiles. Collis is also enjoying being a grandfather to two young grandsons, and he has found himself an active participant in his wife, Lois', orchid hobby (obsession). Lois and Collis are also active fishermen, and Collis continues to enjoy completing home remodeling projects. He is currently collaborating on a book, and remains a steadfast supporter of the Arkansas Academy of Science.